

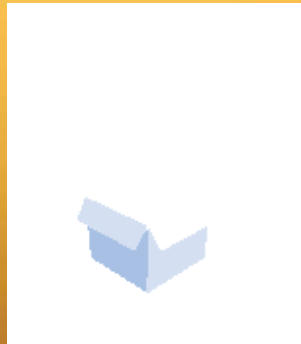
AN INTRODUCTION TO THE
THEOLOGY
OF THE

Body

Not for Duplication

DISCOVERING THE MASTER PLAN FOR YOUR LIFE

Presented by
CHRISTOPHER WEST



STUDENT WORKBOOK

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ABBREVIATIONS

CCC	<i>Catechism of the Catholic Church</i> , Second Edition (Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1997)
EA	<i>Ecclesia in America</i> , John Paul II's apostolic exhortation on the Church in America (Pauline, 1999)
EV	<i>Evangelium Vitae</i> , John Paul II's encyclical letter on the Gospel of Life (Pauline, 1995)
FC	<i>Familiaris Consortio</i> , John Paul II's apostolic exhortation on the Christian Family (Pauline, 1981)
GS	<i>Gaudium et Spes</i> , Vatican II's Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (Pauline, 1965)
LF	<i>Letter to Families</i> , John Paul II's Letter in the Year of the Family (Pauline, 1994)
LR	<i>Love and Responsibility</i> , Karol Wojtyla's (John Paul II's) philosophical work on sexuality (Ignatius, 1993)
MD	<i>Mulieris Dignitatem</i> , John Paul II's apostolic letter on the Dignity and Vocation of Women (Pauline, 1988)
MI	<i>Memory and Identity</i> , John Paul II's final written work before his death (Rizzoli, 2005)
NMI	<i>Novo Millennio Ineunte</i> , John Paul II's apostolic letter at the Close of the Great Jubilee (Pauline, 2001)
TOB	<i>Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body</i> , John Paul II's general audience addresses on Human Love in the Divine Plan (Pauline, 2006)
VS	<i>Veritatis Splendor</i> , John Paul II's encyclical letter on the Splendor of Truth (Pauline, 1993)
WH	<i>Witness to Hope</i> , George Weigel's biography of Pope John Paul II (Harper Collins, 1999)

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CONTENTS

A. WHAT IS THE THEOLOGY OF THE BODY?

Session 1:	An Education in Being Human.	2
	<i>Study Questions</i>	6
Session 2:	The Great Analogy of Spousal Love	8
	<i>Study Questions</i>	13

B. THE GIFT OF OUR CREATION AND REDEMPTION

Session 3:	Man and Woman He Created Them (Our Origin)	16
	<i>Study Questions</i>	19
Session 4:	Man and Woman He Redeemed Them (Our History).	20
	<i>Study Questions</i>	24

C. THE MARRIAGE MADE IN HEAVEN

Session 5:	The Resurrection of the Body (Our Destiny)	28
	<i>Study Questions</i>	32
Session 6:	Celibacy for the Kingdom	34
	<i>Study Questions</i>	38

D. THE MARRIAGE MADE FOR EARTH

Session 7:	Marriage as a Sacrament	42
	<i>Study Questions</i>	45
Session 8:	The Language of Sexual Love	46
	<i>Study Questions</i>	50

Glossary	52
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WHAT IS THE
THEOLOGY
OF THE

Body

Not for Duplication

Session 1

AN EDUCATION IN BEING HUMAN

1. THE FOUNDATION OF LIFE AND CULTURE

Rediscovering the Meaning of Life

“Theology of the body” (TOB) is the working title John Paul II gave to 129 talks he delivered between September 1979 and November 1984. It is a biblical reflection on the meaning of human embodiment as male and female, particularly as it concerns the call of the two to become “one flesh.” But it is crucial to realize that the TOB is not only meant for married people.

- If it is true, as some say, that the TOB is “all about sex,” we must ask ourselves: *What is sex all about?*
- To ask questions about the meaning of sex (that is, the meaning of our creation as male and female) is to ask questions about the very meaning of human existence.
- The TOB takes us on an exhilarating “trinitarian journey” that leads us ever-upward from the body to (1) the union of man and woman, to (2) the union of Christ and the Church, and from there (3) into the eternal union of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
- Based on the mystical teachings of John of the Cross, John Paul II uses spousal union as a “lens” through which to view the whole of existence, the whole of reality and of God’s plan for humanity.

1a. What we learn is obviously “important with regard to marriage.” However, it “is equally essential ... for the [understanding] of man in general: for the ... self-understanding of his being in the world” (TOB 102:5).

1b. Within the context of sexual love, the TOB affords “the rediscovery of the meaning of the whole of existence, of the meaning of life” (TOB 46:6). Therefore, “this theology of the body is the basis of the most appropriate method of man’s ... self-education” (TOB 59:3).

HEAVENLY FATHER,
*We praise you and thank you
for the great gift of creating us
in your image and likeness as male
and female. Help us to understand
our bodies “theologically” – as a
sign of your own life and love.*

The Importance of the TOB

Questions concerning marriage and human sexuality are no footnote in life. They are of utmost importance to each and every one of us, and to the survival of civilization itself.

1c. The call to communion inscribed in our sexuality is “the fundamental component of human existence in the world” (TOB 15:5), “the foundation of human life” (EA 46), and, hence, “the deepest substratum [foundation] of human ethics and culture” (TOB 45:3).

Sexual attitudes and behaviors have the power to orient not only individuals, but entire nations and societies toward respect for life – or toward its utter disregard.

- In short, as sex goes, so go marriage and the family.
- As marriage and the family go, so goes the world.

1d. “It is an illusion to think we can build a true culture of human life if we do not ... accept and experience sexuality and love and the whole of life according to their true meaning and their close inter-connection” (EV 97).

If the task of secular ideologies at work in twentieth century was to rid that century of the Christian sexual ethic, the task of the Church in the twenty-first century must be to reclaim it.

- But the often repressive approach of previous generations of Christians won’t suffice.
- We need a fresh approach that reveals the beauty of God’s plan for man and woman and the joy of living it.
- God grants the Church what she needs when she needs it.

2. WHAT MAKES THE HUMAN BODY “THEOLOGICAL”?

Unity of Body and Soul

In Christian catechesis, people are used to an emphasis on the spiritual realm. Yet, many people are unfamiliar, and even uncomfortable, with an emphasis on the body.

- TOB is a clarion call for Christians not to be more “spiritual” but to be more *incarnational* – to put *flesh* on the spiritual life.

DEAR JESUS,

*Please heal us from the wounds
caused by any repressive or
puritanical approaches to sexuality
that may have masqueraded as
“Christianity” in our upbringing.
Show us the truth about the
body and sex that will set us
free to love in God’s image.*

“I STARTED *PLAYBOY* MAGAZINE AS A
PERSONAL RESPONSE TO THE HURT AND
HYPOCRISY OF OUR PURITAN HERITAGE.”

– HUGH HEFNER



POINTS TO PONDER

- Where did you learn about sex for the first time?
- Was there open, honest communication in your family about sex? Was it a taboo subject?
- What kind of impression did you receive from your parents about sex? From siblings? From friends? From the media? From the Church? From sex-ed classes?

- We are not spirits trapped in a body. We are body-persons; incarnate spirits.

2a. Man “is a person in the unity of his body and his spirit. The body can never be reduced to mere matter: it is a *spiritualized body*, just as man’s spirit is so closely united to the body that he can be described as an *embodied spirit*” (LF 19).

2b. “As a being at once body and spirit, man expresses and perceives spiritual realities through physical signs and symbols” (CCC 1146).

2c. “‘The flesh is the hinge of salvation.’ We believe in God who is creator of the flesh; we believe in the Word made flesh in order to redeem the flesh; we believe in the resurrection of the flesh, the fulfillment of both the creation and the redemption of the flesh” (CCC 1015).

The Body As “Sacrament”

If the body can be understood as a “sacrament,” sacrament here simply means the making visible of the invisible. We cannot see God. As pure Spirit, God is totally beyond our vision. Yet Christians believe that the invisible God has made himself visible. How?

2d. In “the body of Jesus ‘we see our God made visible and so are caught up in love of the God we cannot see’” (CCC 477).

God’s mystery has been revealed in human flesh. For in Christ, “the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily” (Colossians 2:9).

- “Theology of the body,” therefore, is not only the title of a series of talks by John Paul II on the meaning of marriage and sexual union.
- The phrase “theology of the body” represents the very *logic* of Christianity.

2e. “Through the fact that the Word of God became flesh, the body entered theology ... through the main door” (TOB 23:4).

There is, in fact, no other way for a human being to encounter the mystery of God in its fullness than through the human body: through Christ’s body *and* our own.

2f. “The body, in fact, and only the body, is capable of making visible what is invisible: the spiritual and the divine. It has been created to transfer into the visible reality of the world the mystery hidden from eternity in God, and thus to be a sign of it” (TOB 19:4).



Summary

- The TOB is not merely a reflection on marriage. Rather, the TOB provides a “lens” through which to view the whole mystery of human life. If you have a body, this theology applies to you!
- Since the union of man and woman is the deepest foundation of ethics and culture, it’s impossible to build a “culture of life” if we do not reclaim the true meaning of human sexuality.
- The human person is not a “spirit” trapped in a body, but rather a profound unity of body and soul. The human body expresses the mystery of the human person.
- If it seems strange to speak of the body as a “theology,” it shouldn’t if we believe in the *Incarnation*. God has chosen to reveal himself in and through human flesh – theology *of the body*. This phrase represents the very logic of Christianity.
- The thesis of the TOB is that the body alone is capable of making visible what is invisible – the spiritual and divine. God created the human body to be a sign of the mystery hidden within the Trinity from all eternity.

STUDY QUESTIONS FOR:

SESSION 1: AN EDUCATION IN BEING HUMAN

1. Why do you think John Paul II began his pontificate by emphasizing this deeper understanding of the human person and sexual love?
2. Why is this teaching for all people and not just for married couples?
3. What is the effect of a culture's understanding of sexuality on the overall health of the culture?
4. What are some examples of humanity's attempts to build a culture without morals or without God? What has been the result?
5. What is your reaction to the following statement by Christopher West?

“If the task of secular ideologies at work in twentieth century was to rid that century of the Christian sexual ethic, the task of the Church in the twenty-first century must be to reclaim it.”
6. Have you seen in your own life or the life of others the “false split” of body and spirit that Christopher West spoke of? If so, which one was more emphasized and what were the ramifications?
7. How does the body make invisible things visible?
8. Why do people often disdain their bodies rather than see God's beauty in them?

